

## **INFORMATION POLICY MONTANA LEGISLATIVE BRANCH**

### **A. General Policy Regarding Requests for Information**

1. The mission of the staff of the Montana Legislative Branch is to serve the Montana Legislature, its members, governmental units, and the public on behalf of the Legislature in support of the legislative function.
2. In support of the mission, the Branch staff are committed to responding to requests for information accurately, fully, objectively, and in a timely manner.
3. To ensure optimal employment of staff resources, mitigate duplication of effort, and minimize the opportunity for contradictions, each request for information will be assigned to the division best-suited to respond regardless of the division to which the request is initially made. The staff of the Legislative Branch will work cooperatively in assigning all requests. If the best-suited division is not easily identifiable, the division directors will determine which division(s) will respond.
4. Immediately upon receipt of a request for information, the appropriate person in the division receiving the request will notify the appropriate persons in each of the other divisions of the request. The notification should include the name of the requestor, the general and specific nature of the request, the division(s) and person(s) designated to respond, and the date by which a response is requested.
5. A response to a request for information must be accommodated within the context of other assigned work and to the extent that the request is relevant to the mission of the respective Branch divisions.
6. A request for information that is estimated to involve 16 hours or less of staff time in preparing a response may be accommodated in accordance with these policies as a regular matter of business. For any request that is estimated to involve between 16 and 40 hours of staff time, the chairman and vice chairman of the Legislative Council, Audit Committee, or Finance Committee as appropriate with respect to the division appropriate to respond to the request must be consulted to approve allocation of time. A request that is estimated to involve in excess of 40 hours of staff time must be approved for response by the supervising committee of the division(s) to which the information requested

is assigned.

7. Persons requesting voting records of members of the Legislature in person must collect such information in person from legislative records. To assure accuracy, an employee is not allowed to divulge voting records over the telephone or by mail unless the material is quoted or copied from the *History and Combined Final Status*. Retrospective compilation of voting records of individual legislators is not a service provided by the staff of the Branch.

#### **Policy Regarding Information Requests from Legislators**

1. A request for information from a legislator will ordinarily be responded to by the deadline set by the legislator, provided that the work entailed in responding to the request can reasonably be accomplished within the time requested without unduly supplanting other assigned work and without requiring overtime to be worked.
2. If a legislator requests the same or similar information from more than one division, the divisions' staffs will work cooperatively to respond to the request in the most efficient and effective manner possible.

#### **Policy Regarding Information Requests from Non-Legislators**

1. Each division of the Legislative Branch has a unique mission that affects its relationship toward providing information services to non-legislators. Each division is responsible to project a positive image of the Legislative Branch in responding to inquiries concerning the role of the Legislature and the divisions of the Branch, ongoing work, available work products, and other readily available information. Because of its significant role in the production of legislative information documents and information services, the Legislative Services Division's mission fills a major role in responding to public information requests. Unless specifically authorized by law or policy, it is not the role of any division of the Legislative Branch to research, compile, or edit information or undertake research projects for non-legislators.
2. As the commission on interstate and international cooperation under 5-11-301, MCA, it is the policy of Legislative Council for the Legislative Branch staff to assist the Council of State Governments, the National Conference of State Legislatures, and similar organizations with which Montana has a special relationship for sharing information, to accommodate requests for information

within the guidelines established in 5-11-301, MCA, or within other applicable policies established by the Legislative Council.

3. An appropriate request for information from a non-legislator will be responded to as time allows, provided that the work entailed in responding to the request can reasonably be accomplished without unduly supplanting other work and without requiring overtime to be worked.
4. If a non-legislator requests from Branch staff information that is inconsistent with the staff's mission, the requestor will be referred to whomever is considered to be mostly likely able to accommodate the request.